

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, February 22, 2022
Virtual

EAC members present –D. Beane, C. Curran-Myers, S. Crothers, W. Vitale

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, D. Chesson, D. Myers, S. Bachman

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Curran-Myers moved, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the January 25, 2022 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Nazario connected to the meeting at this time.

BERKS ALLIANCE PRESENTATION

Mr. Myers stated that Berks Alliance is a coalition of County anchor institutions and larger employers and non-profit organizations. He stated that the Alliance works to increase community development with a focus on Reading.

Mr. Myers stated that the Alliance has worked on a downtown façade program (with hopes that Reading would start its own program), drafted the RFP for the City's properties at 5th & Penn Sts (issued by the Scott Administration; withdrawn by the Moran Administration; three potential developers recently responded to the request for qualifications), assisted with the Strategic Plan for the now disbanded Downtown Improvement District, the passenger rail study, and is working with Berks County to expand broadband access.

Mr. Myers stated that forums and spotlight programs have been held on creative place making, transit oriented development, the Latino Development Corp, murals, BCTV, CollegeTowne, and entrepreneurial and start up business assistance. He stated that the Alliance is working with Leadership Berks to help improve Reading's downtown. He noted his hope that the County will use its

American Rescue Plan funding to coordinate projects with the Reading School District and the City. He stated that he would love to host a spotlight program for the EAC and the sustainability efforts being made by the City.

Mr. Nazario questioned how the Alliance measures the effects of programs. Mr. Myers stated that there are many ways to measure effects. He stated that the façade program was utilized by diverse business owners. He stated that measuring passenger rail would be whether or not service is restored to Reading. He explained that the programs are presented on ideas and topics to stimulate community activity but are not programs run by or sponsored by the Alliance. He stated that upcoming programs will feature the work of the Hispanic Center to increase education, the Federal Reserve Bank, and street corridors and housing issues.

Mr. Nazario questioned benchmarks. Mr. Myers stated that the Alliance tried to persuade Reading Hospital (Tower Health) to locate services downtown that was not successful. He stated that governmental collaboration can be difficult. He noted the Alliance's goal of a healthier, wealthier and more prosperous community.

Ms. Chesson questioned the Alliance's work on the murals and any arts / culture programs. Mr. Myers stated that the Alliance assisted with the public art project on Cherry St. He stated that a mural walking tour was held in West Reading. He stated that the Alliance held a spotlight program on the Hope mural and noted his hope that additional murals would be installed. He stated that murals provide a statement of place and engage communities. He stated that approximately 220 people were involved in the Hope mural project.

Mr. Vitale stated that he has attended many of the Alliance programs and they are well represented in this presentation. He stated that they are informative and he found them very useful. He expressed the belief that there is a very real possibility that rail service will return to Reading on the heels of the study done by the Alliance. He stated that he has observed that next steps and responsible entities are not always clearly defined during the programs so that projects can move forward. He encouraged all present to watch the program on creative place making.

Mr. Myers stated that he hopes that members of Leadership Berks will help move projects forward. He stated that the Greening Penn Street Plan and the Downtown Strategic Plan have been used as platforms to educate others and to encourage

them to find ways to move projects forward. He expressed the belief that good ideas will get traction and move forward. He noted the need to engage the community and work together. He expressed the belief that the Alliance seeds the actions and activity and that community engagement is critical.

Mr. Nazario agreed with the need for community engagement and stated that is why he questioned measures and benchmarks. He stated that he was surprised that money has been spent but there are no concrete measures of success. Mr. Myers stated that the only funds spent by the Alliance was \$70,000 for the passenger rail study. He expressed the belief that there will be dramatic impacts – both economically and environmentally – if passenger rail is restored to Reading.

Mr. Nazario expressed the belief that most of the people engaged in the Hope mural were white and this does not reflect the community. He expressed the belief that the Alliance is Wyomissing telling Reading what it should do. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is not true and that Mr. Nazario was not present for the Hope program to see for himself. Mr. Myers stated that the Alliance is not Wyomissing telling Reading what to do.

Mr. Nazario stated that that is not what he is hearing. He questioned the number of people involved in the Hope mural. Mr. Myers stated that he does not have that information because it wasn't an Alliance project.

Mr. Nazario became argumentative and stated that the Hope project was flawed. Mr. Myers again explained that this was not an Alliance project. He stated that a spotlight program was held about the project. He stated that the Alliance is trying very hard to be inclusive.

Mr. Nazario again noted the need for measures. Mr. Myers stated that the Alliance engages the community in dialog. He noted his hope that more people in Reading and Berks would be connected to broadband services. He stated that the Tech Centro run by Latino Development includes GED and ESL programs along with job training with an intentional focus on student success. He stated that each measurement must be different depending on the topic.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that people engage on projects. She stated that studies show where to focus energy and find opportunities. She noted her hope that projects are a reflection of what people in the community really need / want.

Mr. Nazario noted the group Reading Rising. Mr. Vitale stated that the Alliance includes many grass roots people. Mr. Nazario disagreed and stated that these people are not grass roots and are not rooted in Reading.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for this discussion at another time. He noted the need to consider ways to measure projects and who benefits from them.

Mr. Myers noted his hope that Reading would be intentional about developing downtown and around the train station. He stated that Latino organizations are involved and stated that he welcomes ideas and suggestions for future spotlight programs.

Mr. Vitale stated that engagement is challenging. He expressed the belief that having a spotlight program on the EAC would be helpful and would be a great opportunity for outreach.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and suggested that the Communication Committee plan for this opportunity. She stated that the Alliance can reach many business professionals and would provide new network opportunities for Mr. Nazario and Ms. Chesson. She suggested discussing how this opportunity will assist with increasing awareness of the need for climate action.

Mr. Vitale agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers and that the Alliance is a great way to engage businesses.

Mr. Beane stated that this has been a great presentation. He thanked Mr. Myers for the update and stated that he is always welcome to attend.

Mr. Myers disconnected from the meeting at this time.

SIGNAGE, MAPPING

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has no report.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is meeting with the Philadelphia Water Dept (PWD) representative next week to finalize the sign language. She stated that PWD does not currently have signage for pervious surfaces.

INVASIVE PLANTS / NOXIOUS WEEDS

Mr. Beane stated that he has contacted Bill Sands from the Hessian Camp neighborhood. He stated that this neighborhood is very active and holds regular meetings. He stated that Mr. Sands thinks that having a walk through is a great idea. He stated that many in the neighborhood do hands on landscaping. He noted his hope to have this walk through in late April or early May.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she would do the College Heights walk through first. She also noted the need for a walk along Neversink Mountain and to address the bamboo along the edges of that preserve.

Mr. Beane agreed with this approach. He stated that next week is National Invasive Species Awareness Week and this is great timing to get started.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will also speak with Mr. Lloyd from Berks Nature to assist. She noted the need for people to get out and see what's happening. She expressed the belief that the spread of invasives can be slowed down to reduce stress on the forests but that it cannot be stopped. She expressed the belief that the invasives will eventually naturalize into the ecosystem.

Mr. Beane stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers will continue planning the walks and suggested that this also be the topic of the March BCTV program.

Ms. Curran-Myers also noted the need for educational materials and signage along the preserve boundaries. She stated that she is working with Public Works and the Mt. Penn Preserve on signage and on the expansion of the yard waste pick up program. She stated that a meeting is being held tomorrow to discuss these items.

Mr. Vitale agreed with the need for these walks. He questioned if residents from the City Park, Egelman's and Pendora areas could also participate with Hessian Camp. He noted the need to determine if there are areas in northwest Reading and the 18th Ward that need attention. Ms. Smith stated that she will check with the District Councilors.

Mr. Beane noted the need for continual educational outreach.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City is working with South of Penn on a project in the 300 block of S 7th St. She stated that the neighbors would like to use this parcel as an extra backyard space.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this project can be used as a template for similar projects in other neighborhoods.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she called Ms. Noviello and left a message. She stated that she clearly noted the need for the EAC to know Ms. Noviello's intention and encouraged her to attend today's meeting. She stated that she also sent an email with more details. She stated that there has not been any response. She stated that she will now mail a hard copy letter.

Mr. Nazario stated that he has two people that are interested in serving as members. He stated that he will provide applications to them.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Mr. Beane stated that he has no report.

ACT 2 DATABASE

Mr. Beane stated that he will contact Liberty Environmental to move this project forward as their new summer interns begin their work.

LISTENING SESSIONS WITH THE EAC

Mr. Beane suggested waiting until there are more EAC members to begin this project. He expressed the belief that this will require much coordination.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Communications Committee is currently discussing this project.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that Mr. Nazario and Ms. Chesson will be able to assist.

MP3 ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has agreed to serve in this capacity. She stated that a member of the EAC was specifically requested. She stated that she is already working with the MP3 on signage and trails.

WWTP ENERGY AUDIT

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this project is proceeding. She stated that staff is currently learning the software program to measure benchmarks. She stated that

the audit will be done for all City buildings. She stated that she expects the audit to begin in mid to late March.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that work on the Plan continues. She stated that the City is also working on an Active Transportation Plan which will be incorporated.

EARTH DAY / GREAT AMERICAN CLEAN UP

Ms. Ayers-Fisher announced that these events will take place on April 23.

CODE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Mr. Vitale stated that this work has been put on the back burner to address engagement. He stated that there is also a question about when the City will update its Codes and suggested that the review begin after that is complete.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed. She stated that everything is set up for when the Committee is ready.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Mr. Vitale.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has consistently amended the City's Code as needed.

Ms. Curran-Myers requested that Mr. Vitale keep his eye on the industry and follow what they are doing.

Mr. Vitale stated that the information that Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided on the LEED for Communities program was a very helpful summary of what to think about.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that some of Mr. Nazario's questions can be addressed through this program. She noted the need for real end goals and how to drill down to see if improvements are made and who / what is affected.

Mr. Vitale stated that it may also provide ideas of other issues for community engagement in addition to water.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher explained that Reading was certified as a STAR Community eight years ago. She stated that STAR has now become part of LEED Communities and the City's work has already begun.

Ms. Curran-Myers used environmental racism as an example. She stated that the process helped Reading see how to address this issue.

Mr. Nazario stated that this can also be helpful in small conversations. He stated that earlier in the meeting he did not feel that the EAC supported him.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Mr. Myers understands this issue but that this is not what the Alliance addresses.

Mr. Nazario noted the need to listen to black and brown people for change to happen. He stated that these conversations may be uncomfortable but they bring about change. He noted that he feels that not everyone is on the same page.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is not true and is not a fair statement. She stated that this is not the topic that Mr. Myers was asked to present.

Mr. Vitale stated that he noted the need for further discussion at another time. He expressed the belief that this is not the forum for that discussion. He agreed that it is an important conversation to have and expressed the belief that Mr. Nazario had more support than he sensed. He stated that these meetings are for a short amount of time with a lengthy agenda of items to cover.

Mr. Beane stated that he has another meeting at this time and asked Ms. Curran-Myers to conclude the meeting. He disconnected from the meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained the purpose of the bike rack agenda item. She expressed the belief that there are many ways to measure and the need for some measurements stop progress. She stated that sometimes measurements do not provide the results that are expected. She expressed the belief that bad metrics are worse than no metrics. She stated that the EAC continues to work on inclusiveness.

Mr. Vitale suggested that this conversation continue at the March 3 Communications Committee meeting. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed. It was decided to have a fully virtual meeting for a three hour period. Ms. Smith will send out an updated meeting link.

RAWA TOUR

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the tour will begin at 10:30 am and members should meet at the RAWA building on Kutztown Rd to carpool to Ontelaunee. She stated that the tour will take place on March 4 and will be held regardless of the weather. She noted the need to dress for the weather and wear shoes that can get muddy.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date is Tuesday, March 22 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk